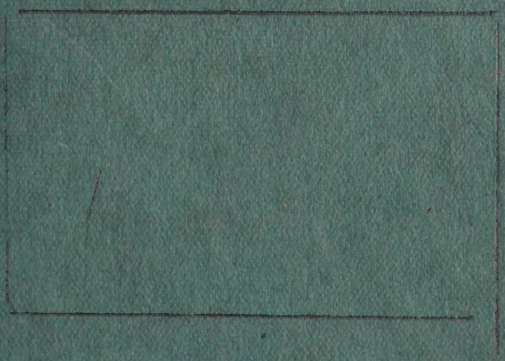
TO·THE PEOPLE WE·LIKE

FRANCES·LESTER·WARNER



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To the People We Like

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A Toast and a Bouquet

BY

FRANCES LESTER WARNER

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The people we like! May their conversation never grow less. May their tires never flatten. May their boats never leak, their clocks never stop, their pipes never freeze, their fishing-lines never part cable. May their moving-vans never turn turtle. May their hydroplanes never collide.

May their dreams never dwindle, their loves never cease, their plastering never come down. May they be visited this day with a shrewd suspicion that we wish them well.

And if, in their great modesty, they

wonder how we happen to entertain these lurking sentiments in their favor, let them scan this record of their works and ways for some glimmer of the reason why.

To begin with, there are nine main categories of liking. A very extravagant friend-maker could probably count up many more. The nine that we have in mind are only the ones most readily recognized by those of us who are reasonably frugal in matters of the congenial glow.

Each category implies a test. Each test implies a quality. To pass them all, one would need to have a chameleon spirit of the most iridescent dye. But most persons in the mid-years of fine friendship have passed at least a few.

I

The first of these categories is the hardest to define. It includes the friend about whom we might say what a certain Cape Breton fisherman's wife, described in Mr. Henry Munroe Rogers's 'Memories of Ninety Years,' once said about Mr. Rogers. She was noticing his success in making himself agreeable to the fisher folk at one of Mrs. Rogers's neighborhood parties in their summer home. 'My!' said the fisherman's wife to her hostess, as she watched the genial master of ceremonies going about easily from group to group. 'My! Ain't he a solvent?'

There are friends who act as 'solvents' in our minds. They help us blend the stiff incongruities of experience into something that will not clog our brains. Our ideas flow more

easily when they are around. And if we want to know whether, for us, any given person falls into this class, we need only ask ourselves one question about the moment when, in the middle of a busy day, the memory of that friend unexpectedly flashes into mind.

The sudden thought of him: does it, in some characteristic fashion, reassure us? And does it, no matter how we may happen to be feeling, seem to 'go to the spot'?

Here is a highly specialized relationship, beyond anybody's power to instigate or control. Among all our acquaintances, there are some about whom we worry; some about whom we wonder; some who stir us up or tone us down; some who worry about us and for whose sake we know we ought to tinker up our characters

and improve. But here is a friend who facilitates our thinking without interrupting it. He can enter our state of mind like a fortunate remark dropped into a conversation, amazingly apropos.

According to the drama of the moment, he takes his place. If we are feeling benevolent, he gives focus to the warm beam of our approval. If we are critical, he balances aptly on the fine edge of our esteem. If we are upset, we know this would not shock him, for he, too, has the emotional suppleness to stand occasionally upon his head. If our likings are catholic and capacious, he promenades without jealousy or jostlings, all up and down the sociable terraces of our minds. And if our space reserved for personal likings is limited and hid-

den, he fits into it with a rare perfection that gives us new confidence in our relations with the world. He is good for us when we are feeling spiritually dead and brittle, like the influenza patient who observed mournfully, 'The universe has turned a page on me, and left me pressed between the leaves.'

Oh, the persons who are solvents for hard moods! We owe them much. In particular we owe them one rather valuable thing: the assurance that, in just the degree to which we have liked them, we ourselves must be compatible with some phase of the human blend. We could not have liked any human being quite so well if we ourselves were totally fossilized.

II

The genuine 'solvent' class is always unconscious of its function. Such magic can never be deliberately achieved. And this is true almost to the same extent of the second group, which is made up of our favorite companions out of doors. The question that settles a person's membership in our especial cult of the woods and hills is partly athletic and partly personal:

Can we go a-field with him?

This does not mean that we necessarily long for him every time we thrust a walking-shoe outdoors. There are many fine members of this class whom we would not take with us into a cranberry bog, or for a sail in a squally catboat, or for a paddle in a

dubious canoe, or on a rough-scuff all-day tramp, unless we were to be trailed by a caterer's squad with an ice-box and a steam-table in their van. They do not take kindly to the compleat angler's manner of lunching sparsely 'on a radish.' There are also excellent friends with whom we would not plan to climb a mountain. Their attitude toward the up-grade is expressed in thumping syllables by Mr. Gilbert Chesterton when he declares, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, but I will not lift up my carcase thither.' These stand-patters on the level we shall not try to budge.

But does our friend, in some way, consort happily with the woods and fields? He may not be skilled in any sport, but for our own favorite form of country escapade is he just the thing?

How about him on what President Seelye used to call 'a junket'? How about him for a drive to the seashore with a supper on the ledges near the lighthouse and an hour of rowing in a longshoreman's dory afterwards? Can we watch a sunset with him and say no word — or watch a sunset and talk our heads off, if, like Mrs. Gamp, we are feeling 'so dispoged'? Does his presence add to the refreshing quality of our view?

The true out-of-doors companion enhances natural scenery for us. Some times he does it by his companionable silence, sometimes by his companionable words. If our friend is fairly vocal, he often gives familiar objects an extra glamour by a casual phrase, as a walking-partner of mine did once for a simple dandelion gone to seed.

It was the first white dandelion globe that we had seen that year, and it stood unusually tall, uncommonly perfect, looking not so much gone to seed as fully feathered out. My companion paused to gaze admiringly at it. (It was not on our lawn.) 'When a dandelion is ready to blow, don't you think it ought to be called a Dandelion Emeritus?' said he. Ever since, in my scale of floral values, dandelions have stood on a distinguished academic plane.

Not only what is said, but also our friend's manner of accepting situations will make a scene stand out picturesquely in our minds. For instance, a group on snowshoes once started to climb a slippery hill. The hill had to be climbed, because on one side of it lay the river, on the other

side of it lay deep woods, beyond it stretched the only road toward home, and sunset was coming on. The heavy snow on the hillside was coated with a thick crust, so glare that you could not dig a hand-hold in it, or even stick the stem of your snowshoe into it in an emergency to hold on. You had to work your way upward in a flat-footed half-seated way, providing friction as you went along with the corners of your coat. Nobody could help you. Snowshoeing is not a coöperative affair. Neither was it safe to take the snowshoes off and crawl up on all fours, because the drifts under the crust were very deep.

The best snowshoer in the group, a rosy girl with a British education, was the last to make the top. This was because when she had nearly reached

the summit, well in advance of the party, she took hold of a safe-looking sapling, and it came up by the roots. Back down the hill, little tree in hand, she sped as if on skis. Just now she was cautiously edging herself, by sheer force of character, up again. Everybody else was waiting at the top. The men of the company gathered stout branches to extend to her when she should come within reach.

Presently an optimist in the successful waiting group called down to her cheerily, 'It's *much* less slippery when you reach the top.'

The climber paused, thrust a glove under a showshoe as a temporary brake, glanced upward, pink-cheeked, bright-eyed, and observed politely with just a trace of sardonic English accent, 'I dare say.'

Personality, unimpeachable, well balanced under difficulties, becomes as delightful a part of the fields and hills as any radiant sunset cloud or drifted tree.

III

A snowy countryside is a beautiful setting for the drama of our friendships. But after the brisk excursion comes the returning home to town.

Suppose each of us were given the responsibility of designing a whole township, building into it the elements of architecture and scenery we like best. And suppose we had to assemble an ideal citizenry for this town, selecting persons we know, persons from books, and persons we could invent from our imaginations. Should we take our friend, just as he is, and count him in?

This category of friendship has what seamen call 'stems to it.' Our candidate must be a good one from several points of view. We must like him ourselves, and we must be able to trust him not to spoil our town.

If I were making up a telephone directory for a town to fit my taste, I should have in it the telephone number of at least one talented odd-job workman, like a certain Yankee furnace-man who said to one of his employers when sickness had struck her family, 'All you got to do is just call me on the telephone any time, Mrs. Avery, and I'll come right straight over, even if I ain't comin'.'

Loyal workers of this stamp, who come when they ain't coming, win a high place in the genuine affections of our hearts.

I should also plan to include an enterprising little newsboy for my business street. He would resemble one who sold fifteen loads of newspapers on a showery afternoon when the Red Sox and the Giants were about to play. The shower was beginning to clear in time for the game, but the bleachers were soaking wet. This little newsboy flew about among the crowd at the gateway, yelling briskly, 'Papers? Papers? Buy the papers! If you don't want to read 'em, *sit* on 'em!'

This broad-minded attitude toward literature and utilitarianism will carry my newsboy far.

One more important public servant I shall include, for the sake of the young mothers of my town. This will be the lad who, in one of our great inland cities, once circulated the fol-

lowing business card, which was later reported officially to the 'Washington Star' by the health authorities of Ohio and New York:

Mr. G—— A——, Jr.
Personal Escorter

Tots and kiddies took to school and returned prompt in perfect condishion if received that way. Military discipline. Refined conversashion. All I ask is a trial. Rates 25 cents a weak. Spechiol rates to twins.

Among the patrons who would constantly employ this Personal Escorter, would be a certain busy young mother of four small boys. She represents the less-talked-about variety of bright young womanhood, the resourceful young wife who, though very up-to-

date, still attends to her household, prepares endless purées of vegetables for her children according to the instructions of child-specialists, and in consequence has their diet so constantly on her mind that, as one such attractive mother confessed one day, she never goes out to a dinner party without feeling that she ought to keep saying, 'Eat your spinach, eat your spinach,' to all the men.

Half a dozen such competent young housewives will be found in the houses on one of my prettiest shaded streets.

In one of these houses I shall have the little four-year-old who called his mother upstairs one evening when she was entertaining guests. He had to call her twice before she came. As she finally ran up the stairs to see what he wanted, he remarked with gentle

severity, 'It would have been *better*, Mother, if you had come the *first* time I called.' Able disciplinarians are an asset to the home-life of a town.

For the welfare of the school system, a few eminent authorities in education will come in handy too. At the very head of the list I should place the retired College President who once in his professorial days made a famous rejoinder to a class of sophomore men. A ticklish question had been presented for his decision by a clever student in one of the back seats. The question involved a controversial topic which the professor's answer would lay open to heated argument, and his reply was awaited breathlessly by the class. The professor knit his brows in shaggy contemplation, and thoughtfully replied, speaking very slowly, with weighty

pauses for evident difficult cerebration between the words: 'I should say, Yes — and No. — Yes — in that it is. — And No — in that it is not.'

Instantly the class hit the ceiling as one man. Applause cracked to the echo. Notebooks and blotters were flung in air. An educational expert who has arrived at this degree of mellowed philosophy shall head the academic hierarchy in my town.

And I shall always try to keep there a mother-in-law like one I know, who writes entertaining letters to her married son. She used to have the habit of beginning her letter specifically to her son, and then without warning, in the middle of her letter, making a remark to her son's wife; perhaps starting the letter, 'My dear Andrew,' and then at the top of page three inquiring sud-

denly, 'Did you decide to make over your chiffon velvet dress again this year?'

Her son replied that he had not, and bade her remember that he was the one she was supposed to be writing to. Whereupon, quite unabashed, the mother-in-law began her next letter in this wise:

'My dear Lucinda, whilom Andrew,

'I laughed copiously at yours of recent date ——' and then went on, untrammeled, in her own spontaneous way.

A mother-in-law of this debonair demeanor shall organize my community Mothers' Club.

Among the members of that Club will be some musicians who know how to naturalize music in the home, as this same mother-in-law used to do

years ago when her children were small. The boys invented a musical game for her to play with them on rainy afternoons. When they were exactly in the mood for it, they would corral their mother, seat her on the piano bench, clamber up beside her, and bid her 'play the rugs.' This meant that they would call off the names of all the rugs in the house, and she would have to improvise music to go with them; curious, variegated chords for the Oriental rugs, old-fashioned reels and ballads for the rag rugs in the upper hall, and a slithering glissando for the linoleum on the kitchen floor. It is a pity that nobody was present to note down those impromptu compositions for a modernistic Rug Suite. But they have been noted down in delightful memory all these years.

Each small boy in my town will be permitted to remain a light-hearted care-free creature, *pro tem.* But as to the fathers of young families, they will be highly diverse and disciplined characters, versatile as gardeners, architects, and chauffeurs. One of them, at least, will be available as a camping expert, at the service of the boys.

Preferably, he should resemble a certain noted scientist who used to take his small son on what the youngster called 'Giant Walks.' Out beyond the suburbs of their city they would go, and gigantically they would stride the hills. That small boy is grown up now, and is himself an Alpine climber with a record of tall peaks. And when he takes his own boy hiking nowadays, he says he cannot help wondering how many actual miles were covered by

those old-time Giant Walks. Anyway, they felt gigantic, and that was the main thing, as father and son together paced the woods. By all means let us have a pair of just such walking cronies, coming home at twilight of a Sunday evening, over the western hills.

This is only the beginning of my town. All of us would have many another candidate to propose. The only qualification for a person's admission to this category is a hearty 'yes!' to the question, *Shall we elect him to our ideal town?*

IV

Or does he better ornament the distant scene? This fourth question leads us to the delicate subject of qualified long-distance liking. There is occasionally an interesting acquaintance who, if lived with day by day, would set us

and our whole community by the ears. In merest prudence we could not quite elect him to our town. And yet, whenever we meet him on our trips from place to place, on those occasions when he is not after our scalp, we like him very much indeed. Him we shall therefore keep in constant circulation in foreign cities and remote villas and country châteaus, and in houses quite a distance off a campus, and upon camels in great deserts, and aboard ship on the high seas. For he travels well.

This quality of being more likable when separated from us is noticeable in certain types of very gifted Souls. They have for their motto the remark of the legislator who rose out of order when the Senate was in filibuster assembled and shouted, 'I object to everything!'

Personally, and from a distance, we contemplate that senator with delight. But his remark is sometimes taken as a lifelong slogan by the sort of critic who has said farewell to discrimination in his impulse to be always on the off side. The character of such a critic is frequently courageous, and if he could curb his objections within limits he might accomplish a great deal. But when he extends his disapproval to cover everything, even his closest admirers can spare him from their councils when something important is on the boards. We like him in limited doses, but too much of him we simply cannot stand. The problem of accurately sizing up a person of this calibre would, in all seriousness, be a very comprehensive question in an intelligence test for God.

The walking veto is hard to live with. But he is nothing compared with the human firebrand who always wants to set the river afire whether it needs it or not. Far from hampering us with objections, he can brook no objections himself. He is instantly ablaze with words of flame to shrivel anybody who tries to put a prudent negative in his way. It seems a pity that we find this sort of individual difficult to get along with, for every community needs his originality and dash. But he is able to do a town most good if he dashes in, sets off his brilliant conflagration with a bang, and then dashes out again, leaving some one else to do the reconstruction work. As a steady resident he makes things too hot.

George Washington once wrote a

classic comment on a person of this kind, at the time when the Federal City of Washington was being planned. The person in question had set the Potomac Valley in an uproar by starting to tear down a half-built house that did not belong to him, and by his gift of tongues. Protests were lodged, and the argument grew and grew, until finally l'Enfant (for it was he) gave utterance to still more lively expressions, 'which,' remarks George Washington sedately, 'begat mutual warmth.'

Most of us have encountered vocabularies which did just that. And the First President, in his disappointment over the quarrel, goes on to add, 'It is much to be regretted, however common the case is, that men who possess talents which fit them for peculiar

purposes should almost invariably be under the influence of an untoward disposition, . . . whereby they plague all those with whom they are concerned.'

A whole township of such persons would be an animated spot. But though at times they plague us if they reside too near our elbow, still their talents are infinitely precious, and they strike a vital spark, and we could not possibly spare them from the earth. But how readily we can spare them at judicious intervals! And how cordially we like to think of them when they are off patrolling the rim of the universe on long romantic trips.

v

Very different from this precarious form of liking is our safe relationship

with the friend who can fit in and work with us like a more gifted additional self. We are lucky if we have a natural working partner of this kind. Are we fortunate enough to know where we can find him handy? *For emergencies and projects, is he ours?*

We like some people for this sheer fact; that we and they together make a team. They catch all the balls we throw to them. They steady all the ladders that we climb. Whenever we have bonfires, they help us rake the leaves. They can ply an extra pair of oars in perfect rhythm with our stroke, with no hard words about the loosened oar-lock on our boat. Whenever we are assigned to work with them, they double our enthusiasm and cut our toil in two. Perhaps we have never known them in any other capac-

ity. Perhaps we have never even seen them except in office hours. But if at any time in our lives we have found a perfect team-mate — one with whom we could go ahead on a rush job as if with an extra pair of hands — we have had a revelation of human values that we do not forget.

This may seem a humdrum basis for personal liking. But there is more to it than the mere benefit of having able assistance in our tasks. That might make us grateful, but it would not make us exhilarated. And that is what happens to us when we suddenly discover that here, blessedly bestowed upon us by a miraculous fate, is a person with whom we can work as a windmill works with the breeze. Do we like such a person? Why, we fairly worship him with a solemn thrill.

Given such a partner, we do not need to waste a word. The true emergency comrade divines our needs. Suppose the project we are working on together is the construction of the scenery for a Little Theatre performance. At the moment we personally are down under the staging, rigging the lighting-system, and we need more wire. We need only murmur 'Wire!' from our grotto to our partner up above, and, without taking his eyes or hands from his screw-driver, he shoves the wire and also a pair of pliers to us with his foot. No word is said, but presently we behold approaching us, propelled in the same manner, a flashlight, a roll of rubber tape, and a pair of metal shears. Our partner has placed within our grasp not only what we asked for, but all the

accessories that go with a call for extra wire.

This is a homely illustration, but the same insight extends to the more mysterious realms of complicated mental work. Even there we find a curious medium of communication, perhaps not telepathy but something more reliable, between two perfectly matched experts who are intent on the same task. Their hands and minds seem to work together as if controlled by the same interlacing network of fine nerves. This congeniality may not lead to friendship outside the working field, but it does constitute a distinct variety of liking which belongs in a category of its own.

Of course, our friends in other capacities may belong in this class too. Our own relatives may qualify, and

we are in clover if they do. Once at a large house-party the various branches of a resourceful family were planning how to divide up the housekeeping duties for the crowd. The ladies of the group were to pair off, each pair to have charge of the household on given days. Somebody suggested drawing lots for partners, but at this point one of the capable leading ladies arose and addressed the Chair. She explained that she dearly loved everybody present, but when it came to a working partner she wanted her own daughter.

'My brains aren't what they *were*,' she announced, her bright eyes snapping. 'I'm losing my memory and I can't talk straight, and I have to have a partner who understands what I say even when I say it *wrong!*'

A perennial blessing in a crotchety

world — those inspiring fellow-workmen who have understood our meaning when we said it wrong. Perhaps they were associated with us only for a time. Perhaps they only dashed in and saved the day for us in some emergency. Possibly we have lost trace of them in their progress up and along. But if so, we only hope that they understood how well we liked them half as intuitively as they understood everything else we did not need to say.

VI

If the friend who shares our habits of work is gratefully remembered, so is the one whose favorite amusements happen to agree with ours.

Do our tastes in entertainment coincide? It is something to have a friend with whom we can go to a play, for instance,

without feeling on pins and needles all the evening for fear he will be bored if our drama is too mild for him, or scandalized at us if it turns out to be too brash. He may not precisely agree with us about it, but if we disagree we do it from the vantage-point of a broad plateau of mutual understanding. We are at home together in the large. He knows our point of departure. We know his spiritual landing field. With this basis of mutual knowledge we can always bring back our discussion to common ground. We do not feel that we have taken an inhabitant of an alien planet to see our play.

And if our favorite art is music, then we know that this friend will enjoy what we enjoy in a concert, including all the overtones. If Pablo

Casals has just played an amazing arpeggio on his 'cello, following it up with a chord such as no human being is supposed to be able to play, and in order to achieve his effect has called in the able assistance of his thumb — we can glance at our companion out of the corner of our eye and perceive by the grim twitch of a muscle in his cheek that he has seen what we saw, heard what we heard, and would eye us in return except that Pablo might do anything, anything, and it is not safe to look away.

There is such a thing as liking a person for the simple fact that he 'gets all the way' on our favorite form of art, our favorite form of humor, and the favorite form of hero tale we like to hear. We do not have to edit our conversation for him, either up or

down. He laughs at the right things. We do not have to explain that such and such was not meant to be taken seriously, or that so and so was not intended as a joke. Such explanations make heavy sledding in the casual confab, because matters of humor never can be explained. When something strikes us as exquisitely funny, it gives us a complete refreshing of the spirit if we can chuckle about it in companionship with some one who enjoys it just as much. Such a kindred companion is not met at every turn, for the things that entertain us to the very core are seldom universal jokes.

For instance, there was once a well-traveled lady who had a keen sense of humor for odd words. She was going through Paris and stopped to get a new hat she had ordered in her favor-

ite millinery store. Incidentally she remarked to the milliner that the English hat she was wearing was rather tight.

'Oh,' exclaimed the sprightly milliner in her pretty broken English, 'that, Madame, is simple of remedy. I can easily, in but a moment, aggrandize it for you.'

No sooner said than done. The delighted customer walked out in her comfortably aggrandized hat. It was not so much the skilled handiwork that made her grateful. That could be paid for. What delighted her most was the charming transliteration from the French. The more she thought of it, the more ineffable the notion of an aggrandized chapeau became, until on the boat going back across the Channel she told the story to a

young professor of Romance languages whom she met.

'Oh, yes,' rejoined the young professor instructively. '*Aggrandir* is the word for enlarging things in French.'

How it does take the wind out of our sails when some one does not perceive exactly the quality of pleasure we are deriving in this curious world. And conversely, how we do appreciate the comrade who follows us all the way.

Sometimes, in fact, we store up our enjoyment and do not fully turn it loose in our own minds until we get within earshot of this responsive friend. For instance, the wife of a certain industrial magnate was careful not to let her amusement run away with her when her husband came out with unexpected remarks — es-

pecially on one occasion when a window was suddenly opened above his head. This window was supposed always to be shut, for the capitalist disliked a chilly breeze playing on his scalp. His room was well ventilated by other windows, without any need of this one over the porch. But one night the householder awoke with a start to find the window wide open, a stiff gale blowing in, and a burglar poised halfway across the sill. Outraged, the great executive reared his massive head and thundered to the burglar, 'Either get out or come *in*, but Shut That Window!'

The burglar, taken by surprise, obediently banged down the window and scrambled from the roof. At the time, the intrepid little wife of the hero of this story did not dare to laugh.

But next day, when her husband was safely out of the house, she called up her married daughter to tell her about it, and the telephones rocked with ecstasy at both ends of the wire.

The enjoyment of our own favorite especially lighted prism of comedy is one of the most exclusive pleasures in the world. The friend who values it with us — the friend who brings it to us — we like him as an ancient collector of rare diamonds and emeralds likes another ancient expert who brings him a choice new gem.

VII

Similar tastes make comfortable friends. But occasionally we find an acquaintance who, instead of coinciding with us in any way, is so different from us in his experience that he

represents our whole sum of knowledge in a foreign field. *He opens to us a new aspect of the world.*

Here is the radiant group where are found our favorite teachers and employers and chieftains, friends of our fathers, friends from over the sea, friends of a different social experience, and friends whose hobbies are different from ours.

What glimpses they have given us of treasures we admire. It is through such friendships that we know how a lace-maker feels about bobbins; how a real estate promoter feels about Sunday; how an architect estimates Hornbostle and Ralph Adams Cram; how an islander in the Bay of Fundy feels about the tides.

And as for people's hobbies, I am thinking of an artist in metal-work

who once taught me to make a silver bowl. Probably I shall never go on to make a complete silver tea-service like the one she made, but I owe to her my initiation into the love of malleable metals, my glimpse into the shopwork of strange hammers and blowpipes and little anvils, and my admiration for the choice fraternity of those who pound and pound.

I am thinking also of my friend who raises prize Buff Orpington hens, gorgeous stately creatures with softest plumage, one of which, if I may be excused for boasting, was named for me. I shall never forget the day when my friend instructed me in the technique of how a hen should be carried under your arm, should you ever need to convey one from place to place.

Never carry her head-foremost, be-

cause then she sees the landscape rushing toward her, and she struggles and cackles in alarm. But by all means carry her facing backward. Let her tail-feathers point right onward, and let her head extend out at the rear of your elbow as you proceed. My friend picked up the two queens of the flock, Henrietta and Pertelote, to show me. And sure enough, they rode serenely, thrusting out their necks like golden swans, and glancing about at the universe safely receding from them, like passengers on the observation platform of a train.

Similarly, we learn how a horseback rider feels about the more difficult points of 'posting.' We learn how a golfer feels about niblicks and birdies and stance. And we are let into the dim fact that a small boy thinks of a

discarded safety-razor blade as something inestimably valuable and a shade *risqué*.

And as to those friends whose worldly experience is somewhat outside our own, I shall always remember the remark of a first-class porter who also served occasionally as the 'lay-preacher' in a little colored church. He had heard that there was to be a rummage sale in Pittsburgh, and he asked one of his employers if she had chanced to hear of anybody's sending in any gentlemen's tall silk hats. 'I am very anxious,' he added wistfully, 'to get in touch with a high hat.'

The lady promptly ransacked the whole of polite Pittsburgh until she found a friend's husband who possessed a discarded silk topper of

the requisite size. The treasure was fetched out, and the faithful porter-pastor was put in touch with it at once. Everybody concerned had recognized a human need that deserved to be assuaged. Socially speaking, there are moments for most of us, no matter how democratic we are, when we do enjoy being in touch with a high hat.

VIII

Does he like us?

As to this point, since our inmost hearts are very humble, we can rarely feel cock-sure. Our friends cannot keep telling us every five minutes that they like us — unless we count our expressive friend, the dog. Several times a day, without loss of dignity, a noble setter dog can raise his right paw and vow us fealty, with ardour

(so spelled) in his lovely eyes. A human being, doing this so often, would appear demonstrative. Therefore, while we may have been quite sure that certain persons liked us some little time ago, can we be perfectly sure of it up to date?

Herein resides the chief value of letter-writing between absent friends. The mere fact that we took a pen in hand says much. The only trouble here is the fact that most of us do not write as often as we might wish to, even to our most treasured friends. What conclusions are they drawing? Do they like us still, in spite of lapse of time? Do they save up things to write us about, as we save up things for them, and then never arrive quite at the actual writing-point? Could we start a new page with them at any

time, or have we forfeited our place in their good books?

A model letter after a long mutual silence of this kind was once written by a lively aunt to her equally lively niece. The letter began with a review of their last visit together, and recalled how congenial some of their ideas had been. And then the aunt suddenly broke off the paragraph, announced that all this sounded rather stiff and artificial, and that she would start again. So, halfway down the page she began a fresh paragraph, and said in dashing characters, 'Dear Nancy: — You just suit me.' Whereupon she continued with the news.

The people who just exactly suit us! How we wish that we could adequately tell them so. And how exalted we should feel if we thought they sized

us up with equal favor in return. This question lends a tantalizing quality to human relationships. To be sure, there are some friends with whom we feel more safe than we do with others. Is this because, in our affection for them, we take it for granted that they must share so definite a tie? Or did we like them in the beginning because we knew they first liked us? It is enough to make an exact psychologist dizzy, because it is hard to say which emotion is the reflection of which observation, and which came first. The fact does remain, however, that we are likely to esteem a friend with a little extra gusto if we have heard in a roundabout way that there is something about us that suits his taste. For that fact only, we feel at ease with him. Some very oddly assorted

friendships are accounted for that way. We may not have another single point in common, yet we think highly of our friend's discernment, and for his — or her — delectation we whet our tongues.

IX

The ninth category is even more unestablished upon rhyme or reason. The test question for it can only be, 'Is it unaccountable entirely?' as they say in County Cork. It has no selfish basis, and no unselfish basis either. It includes those who never dreamed that we paid them any attention — even those whom we have never technically 'met' at all. The impression they made upon us may have been as fleeting as when we glance out through the broad window of a dining-car and

see an obviously congenial person rushing down the railway platform to take another train. Why 'obviously congenial'? We could not tell. But we know that we are glad to have that admirable fellow-being in existence, even though running on a different time-table, and going another way. We have no reason to know that such people would be congenial, but they attract our attention as the sun attracts the petals of a plant.

Light as the mist on a whippoorwill meadow — the touch of this sort of liking on our thoughts. It has almost enough of the unreasonable about it to be uncanny. It has enough of silence and unfulfillment to be a little sad. A trace of it lingers in the deeper moments of every friendship. Recognition of a permanent enigma is the

tribute that our sanity pays to human attractiveness. The unaccountable has in it the spice of the eternal, and a good deal of our relish for life and travel would be missing if it should go.

These are the main tests of liking. But what shall we say of the person who combines the best of all these qualities — the person with whom we can do our thinking, walking, laughing, working, talking, one who glorifies any town for us when he is in it, makes foreign lands our habitation when he is away, and makes death seem only just across the threshold when he dies? What shall we say of those few who dwell with us always beside the deep great lakes of the spirit, where liking broadens into love?

We shall say only this. Best wishes

to them, with all our hearts. Best wishes!

And best wishes once more to all the varied people whom we like so well, wherever they may be. If we were superstitious, we might find them a four-leaved clover. We might pick up a pin for them, and lead them out from under ladders, and close their umbrellas always in the house. We might send them a swastika, a rabbit-foot, a horse-shoe, a wish-bone, a white owl's feather, and a load of hay. But since we are not superstitious, we will send them only a bouquet.

May their stars never fall. May their skies never fade —— But let us think of some good wishes that will apply to us both together.

May their trout-lines never get entangled with our fish-hooks. May

we never tread on the stems of each other's snowshoes. May their orchards drop stray apples over our fence-rail. May our sunflowers turn in the direction of their sunshine. And may their windmill-sails whirl briskly in our breeze.

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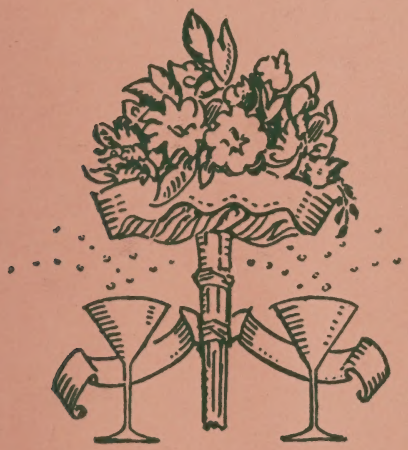
TO·THE·PEOPLE WE·LIKE



BY

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